

Rivals in Heaven: Angels in the Epistle to the Hebrews

GEORG GÄBEL, ESSEN

1. Introduction

1.1 Why mention angels at all?

Given the frequency with which the author of Hebrews mentions angels in the first two chapters of the epistle, he seems to have remarkably little to say about them. Remarkably little, that is, of a positive nature; for the author's stance with regard to angels seems to be decidedly negative. Angels, we are told, are not divine sons of God; they do not share in God's creative activity, nor are they immutable and co-eternal with Him. Unlike the Son, they are not given a throne at God's right hand. Rather, they are servants of the Son and of those who "will inherit salvation" (1:4-14). They are mediators of an inferior revelation (2:1-4); the world to come is not subjected to them, but to the "son of man" (2:5-9), and Christ does not take them into his care (2:16).

Once this has been said, angels apparently cease to be of much interest to our author. Of the thirteen times that angels are mentioned in Heb, eleven occur in the first two chapters,¹ while in the remaining eleven chapters, there are only two more: In Heb 12:22, "myriads of angels" are briefly mentioned as part of a heavenly assembly, and in 13:2, hospitality is recommended on the ground that angels may pose as travellers in need of rest – a time-honoured motif,² but hardly connected to the concerns of the epistle as a whole, and clearly without any connection to the eleven occurrences of "angels" in Heb 1-2. So why does our author mention angels?

1 1:4; 1:5; 1:6; 1:7 (bis); 1:13; 2:2; 2:5; 2:7; 2:9; 2:16.

2 Cf., e.g., Gen 18:1-16 (where the divine guests are not explicitly called angels); 19:1-23; also Attridge, *Epistle* 386 n. 34, on divine messengers as guests in Greco-Roman literature.

1.2 Some (attempts at) answers

It has sometimes been suggested that Heb 1-2 is directed against angel worship³ or against angelomorphic christology.⁴ Nowhere, however, does Heb mention angel worship, and while the importance of angelomorphic motives for early christology has rightly been emphasized in recent years,⁵ such motives hardly occur in Heb.⁶ This is why many exegetes hesitate to follow these hypotheses.⁷ But not only are there no polemics against angel worship or angelomorphic christology. More importantly, there is nothing to indicate that, in the author's view, the christological beliefs of the addressees deserve correction. On the contrary: The author agrees with his addressees about their shared heritage, the christological *ὁμολογία*. Whenever Heb refers to the confession, he urges the addressees to hold fast to it. The aim of Heb is not to correct erroneous christological beliefs, but to make it clear to the addressees why their shared, traditional belief in the exalted Christ is still relevant.⁸

Loren Stuckenbruck's approach is slightly different. While he does not find polemics against angel-worship or angelomorphic christology in Heb itself, he reconstructs a *Vorlage* which, he suggests, was critical

-
- 3 On the history of exegesis, see the overview in Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration* 124-127. Recent exegesis does not in general pursue this interpretation. – According to Gleason, *Angels*, Heb turns against an expectation of angelic support for Jewish-nationalistic hopes and causes.
 - 4 Hannah, *Michael* 138, thinks that Heb engages in polemics against an angel Christology that was "in the air". According to Goulder, *Hebrews*, the addressees of the epistle are Ebionite Christians who believe Christ to have been temporarily possessed by an angelic power. Steyn, *Myth* 1125, thinks that "the danger of blurring the distinction between Christ and the angels was in the air".
 - 5 On angelomorphic christology, cf. Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration*; Carrell, *Jesus*; Gieschen, *Christology*; Hannah, *Michael*; Fletcher-Louis, *Luke-Acts*; Fletcher-Louis, *Revelation*; Hoffmann, *Destroyer*; Steyn, *Myth* 1112-1117. For a critical stance towards some assessments of angelology and its possible role in early Christology, see Vollenweider, *Monotheismus*.
 - 6 On one possible, but very limited and unpolemical, angelomorphic element in the Christology of Heb, cf. n. 48 below.
 - 7 Cf., for many others, Käsemann, *Gottesvolk* 60, and more recently Mach, *Entwicklungsstadien* 287 with n. 22. – There is also a tendency among those who follow the angel worship- and / or angel Christology-hypothesis to concentrate on Heb 1:4-14 and to disregard Heb 2:1-4, 5-9, 16.
 - 8 Notice the reference to "our confession" (*ὁμολογία ἡμῶν*) 3:1; cf. the confession to the Son of God 4:14; cf. also 10:23. That Heb accepts commonly received, traditional Christology in order to re-interpret it by means of cultic theology is a widely accepted and well founded conviction in Heb-exegesis; cf. Hegermann, *Christologie* 343-345; Walter, *Christologie* 154; Gäbel, *Kulttheologie* 240-241, 309-310, 475-477.

against a *Zeitgeist* friendly to angel-worship.⁹ Whatever the merits of his reconstruction, however, it does not explain which function the passages about angels serve in their present context.

Finally, according to Ceslas Spicq, Heb demonstrates the inferiority of the angels to prove the inferiority of the revelation mediated by them.¹⁰ True as this appears to be for Heb 2:1-4, it hardly helps to explain 1:4-14 and 2:5-9, 16. The motif of angels as mediators of revelation in Heb 2:1-4 will have to be accounted for, however. We shall come back to it later.

1.3 Angelic priests? A red herring

One more interpretation suggests itself. Heb 1:14 calls the angels λειτουργικά πνεύματα, which might be rendered as “liturgical spirits”. The well-known focus of Heb on cultic matters seems to lend *prima vista* probability to the assumption that the angels are to be understood as priests¹¹ in the heavenly temple.¹²

Nowhere, however, does the argument in Heb 1:4-14 touch on cultic matters. In Heb 1:14 the word λειτουργικός has to be understood in the sense of “public official/minister”, which is the usual meaning in most hellenistic sources.¹³ Moreover, the middle section of Heb, which is concerned with priesthood and cult, never mentions angels. They appear in the context of the heavenly Jerusalem once (12:22), but nothing is said about a priestly role for them in the heavenly sanctuary. Similarly, Melchisedek is not described in Heb as a heavenly priest, nor even, in so many words, as an angelic figure. This is not to say that Heb or the addressees did not know such traditions.¹⁴ All the more telling, however, is the silence which the epistle keeps about them. According to Heb, all priesthood in heaven is realised solely in the one heavenly high priest, Christ. He is not accompanied by angelic heavenly priests,

9 Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration* 119-139 (reconstruction: 127-135).

10 Spicq, *L'Épître*, II 53.

11 So Karrer, *Brief* 146-147, who argues that the words λειτουργικός κτλ. are related to the cult wherever they occur in LXX.

12 On angels as heavenly priests in early Jewish and Rabbinic literature, see Gäbel, *Kulttheologie* 48-49, 62-69, 71-75, 106, 257.

13 Cf. Spicq, *λειτουργίῳ* κτλ. 378-384.

14 On Melchisedek traditions cf. Horton, *Tradition*; Karrer, *Brief* 263-271, and most recently Bense, *Melchisedek-Typologie* (on gnostic texts: 133-222).

nor does Heb mention any other heavenly high priestly figure.¹⁵ In view of the exclusively christological focus of Heb's cultic theology, angelic priestly mediators are superfluous.

1.4 "Ministering spirits"

So long as one assumes that the first two chapters of Heb are "designed to show that angels are inferior to the Son of God,"¹⁶ it is not only difficult to explain why the author should have wished to demonstrate just that; it also remains unclear what, if anything, Heb 1-2 has to do with Heb 3-13. So, why does Heb talk about angels? In this essay, I will argue that the key to understanding "Angels in Hebrews" is precisely that the epistle has so little to say about them; that, for Heb, angels are not a subject in their own right. And yet, as we shall see, it is essential to understand what the author has to say about angels for understanding his argument in the first two chapters. In this sense, too, they are indeed "ministering spirits".

The Angels and "One who is Son" – Heb 1-2

2.1 The overall argument

Let us first follow the argument in Heb 1-2, so far as it includes references to angels. Heb 1 compares the angels to Christ. He is called "one who is Son"¹⁷ (1:2), and the predicate "Son" is taken up again in the first juxtaposition of Christ and the angels in 1:4-5. The more excellent name which Christ inherited (V.4) is the name of "Son" (V.5), which expresses that his relationship with God is without analogy. This is what makes him superior to the angels and the object of their worship (V.5f).¹⁸ Similarly, υἱός is used in πρὸς μὲν τοὺς ἀγγέλους – πρὸς δὲ τὸν

15 Christ is called the high priest according to the order of Melchisedek (Heb 5:10; 6:20, cf. Ps 110/Ψ 109,4), but Melchisedek is not called a high priest in Heb (nor in Gen 14:18).

16 Goulder, *Hebrews* 393.

17 Without article: the focus is on being "son", on the quality of sonship. On the predicates "Son" and "Son of God" in Heb, cf. Loader, *Sohn* 251-253; Hegermann, *Christologie* 343.

18 "Deutlich behandelt der Verfasser des Hebräerbriefes das Problem [the relationship of Christ and the angels, GG.], indem er auf die Inthronisationsaussagen des Proömiums (1:1-4) eine lange Auseinandersetzung folgen lässt, die den einen 'Sohn Gottes' den אֱלֹהִים בֶּן־יְהוָה gegenüberstellt": Mach, *Entwicklungsstadien* 287.

υἱόν (V.7f) to deepen the contrast between Christ and the angels. In 1:6, the predicate πρωτότοκος also serves to show the difference in quality that exists between Christ and the angels. At the same time, however, it prepares for a possible inclusiveness of the relationship between the “Son” and God, which could include other, later born offspring. This is all the more telling since V.5 had stressed the inadequacy of the predicate “Son” for the angels. This language prepares for the sonship of the many which will be the subject of 2:10.

While, in 1:1-13, the predicate υἱός stresses the exclusiveness of Christ’s relationship with God over against the angels, it occurs again, now in the plural, in 2:10, where humans are called πολλοὶ υἱοί. Here, Christ is not called ὁ υἱός – in fact, the predicate “Son” is no longer used with reference to Christ in chapter 2. This is all the more striking given the marked use of υἱός as a specifically christological predicate in 1:2, 4f, in contrast to the angels. In 2:10, the meaning of the predicate “son” is widened to include humans in that kind of relationship with God which is typically Christ’s, which, however, excludes angels. This is all the more remarkable since angels can be called בני אלהים, “sons of God”, in Judaism.¹⁹ When Heb calls Christ the “Son” in 1:2, 4-5 and then refuses to give this title to the angels, this is not only to contrast the one υἱός and the angelic בני אלהים. The πολλοὶ υἱοί (the humans belonging to the “Son”) are included in the juxtaposition of the “Son” and the angels. Thus, angels and humans are set in contrast. It is the latter, not the former, whom Christ takes into his care (2:16).

To sum up: As the “Son”, Christ is higher than the angels, but at the same time, as the “Son”, he is also the “brother” (2:11) of the human πολλοὶ υἱοί (2:10), and therefore, he is the υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου, the ἄνθρωπος par excellence (2:6). The “Son” of God is the Lord of the angels and the brother of the human υἱοί. The contrast between Christ and the angels serves as backdrop for the description of both his relationships with God (1:5-13) and with humans (2:5-16).

2.2 Adam-Christology in Heb 1-2

What is the common background of christology, anthropology and statements about angels in Heb 1-2? Since 1:3, the argument unfolds in the medium of Adam-Christology, which is also known from other

19 Cf. Braun, *Hebräer* 46; Mach, *Entwicklungsstadien* 75, and, once more, op. cit. 287. Op. cit. 73-81 examples for ἄγγελοι as translation of בני אל or בני אלהים or אלהים. Davidson, *Angels* 334-335, has only one occurrence (11Q13 II 14) for בני אל as designation of angels in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

early Christian sources.²⁰ Christ is called the ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης καὶ χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ (of God). The background of these predicates is the creation of humans in the image, κατ' εἰκόνα, of God, in LXX Gen 1:26-27. Influences of middle platonic Adam- and εἰκόν- speculations may have contributed to this Adam-Christology: According to Philo, the εἰκών of Gen 1:26-27 is an intelligible image of God, which, in turn, becomes the paradigm (παράδειγμα) of phenomenal, earthly man.²¹ As the radiance of God's glory, Christ is the mediator of creation (ὅι' οὐ καὶ ἐποίησεν κτλ. Heb 1:2). He passes on the image of God to humans, and therefore, he is also the true man, the ἄνθρωπος and υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου (2:6).²²

3. The rivalry motif and the interpretation of Psalm 8 – Heb 2:5-10

3.1 The rivalry motif and the interpretation of Psalm 8 in rabbinic literature

In this context, Heb makes use of the traditional motif of rivalry between angels and humans. While the rivalry motif can already be found in early Jewish texts, it is bound up with Ps 8, like in Heb 2,5-9, in rabbinic tradition²³, where, according to Schäfer, it can be ascribed first to Aqiba and his school.²⁴ In written form, it occurs for the first

20 On Adam-Christology in Heb 1-2, see Käsemann, Gottesvolk 62-64; Bruce, Epistle 34-36; Hegermann, Brief 34-35; Weiss, Brief 145; Dunn, Christology 108-111.

21 Philo, all III 96. On heavenly, eternal man as εἰκών and λόγος of God and as archetype of earthly man in Philo, see Eltester, Eikon 39-41.

22 Similarly, the ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων of Phil 2:6-11 is a heavenly, divine being and, as such, the image of God and the paradigm of man. On Adam-Christology in Phil 2:6-11, see Peterson, Befreiung 121 n. 47; Cullmann, Christologie 178-186, esp. 180-183; Käsemann, Analyse 70-73; Hooker, Philippians; Betz, Adam 416, 36-41; Fossum, Name 292-296 (cf. 283-284); Dunn, Christology 113-121 (cf. 123-125); with reservations also Karrer, Jesus 315-316.

23 On the rivalry motif in early Jewish and rabbinic literature, see Bernstein, Angels; Gäbel, Kulttheologie 137-142; Kinzer, Things 41-66; Kister, Observations; Najman, Angels; Schäfer, Rivalität; Schultz, Opposition. For an interpretation of the rivalry motif in rabbinic literature see Goldberg, Heilige.

24 Cf. Schäfer, Rivalität 239-240. Aqiba and his school belong to the early 2nd Tannaite generation (A.D. 90-130), cf. Stemberger, Einleitung 76, 79.

time in the Tosefta (tSota 6:5).²⁵ These texts are of particular interest in the present context. They quote Ps 8, particularly Ps 8:5-6, in certain thematic contexts which always serve to express the rivalry motif. Among these contexts there is, with some frequency, that of the creation of man. I shall give only two examples in short paraphrase:

bSanh 38b²⁶: God created angels to deliberate with them about the creation of man. They advised God not to create man, saying: "What is man...?!" (Ps 8:5). God destroyed these angels and asked others what they thought about creating man. When they gave the same answer, they were destroyed, too. This pattern repeated itself until the angels agreed to God's intention of creating man.

BerR 8:4-6²⁷: God foresaw that evil would come from Adam. He decided, however, not to see the way of evil. The angels asked what the works of men would be. God told them about justice, but not about evil (8:4). Some angels were for, others against the creation of Adam. The former were for "love"; the latter for "truth". But God cast "truth" down to earth and created man – to the angels' surprise. A variant version: While the angels were still debating the advantages or otherwise of creating man, God quickly took his opportunity and created man (8:5). When the angels saw how much God cared for man, they asked: "What is man...?!" (Ps 8:5). God said: What have the other creatures (cf. Ps 8:8) been created for? Like man, for the pleasure of their creator. The angels praised God: "How majestic is thy name...!" (Ps 8:2.10) (8:6).

In these and similar traditions, angels quote Ps 8:5 to express their contempt for humans. In their view, Adam ought not to be created, Israel ought not to receive the Torah, the Shekhinah ought not to leave heaven for the Jerusalem temple, etc. And yet, invariably, God contradicts the angels, takes the side of Adam / Moses / Israel, and shows his preference for them.²⁸

25 In tSota 6:5 there is already a reference to Ps 8:5. Cf. Schäfer, *Rivalität* 236. Stemberger, *Einleitung* 157, dates the final redaction of the Tosefta in the 3rd/4th cent. A.D. It is not clear, however, when the rivalry motif was bound up with Ps 8:5 for the first time.

26 Cf. Rottzoll, *Rabbinischer Kommentar* 59-60; Strack / Billerbeck, *Kommentar* III 681; Schäfer, *Rivalität* 95-96.

27 Midrash Rabbah, ed. Freedman / Simon I 58-59; cf. Schäfer, *Rivalität* 90-91; further Speyer, *Erzählungen* 52-53 (on the rivalry motif in Koran 15:26, 28-33).

28 On the rivalry motif in later, esoteric Jewish texts, where it retains basically the same meaning, see Schäfer, *Engel und Menschen*.

3.2 The interpretation of Psalm 8 in Heb 2

Within Heb 2, verses 5 and 16 form an inclusion. Both verses refer to angels in a negative way. Angels will not rule the world to come (V.5), nor does Christ take them into his care (V.16). Heb does not tell us at first to whom the world to come will be subjected. He does, however, quote Ps 8:5-7 in Heb 2:6b-8a. The quotation describes the position of man / the Son of Man in comparison to the angels and stresses his greatness and glory: It is he who has been crowned king, whom God has given universal rule (V.7b.8a). While, according to the Hebrew text, God made man only a little lower than Elohim (מַעַל מְעַל מֵאֱלֹהִים, Ps 8:6), the LXX, which Heb follows, renders מַעַל מְעַל as παρ' ἀγγέλους and מַעַל מְעַל as βραχύ τι, thus determining the meaning of the ambivalent מַעַל מְעַל and allowing for a temporal interpretation of the son of man's being "lower" than the angels.²⁹ In 2:9, Heb explicitly identifies Jesus and the "Son of Man". What the Psalm had to say about man is now interpreted as a sequence of events: Christ was exalted after he had been made lower than the angels for a short time. Though man's universal lordship is not yet visible, Heb has us look at Christ, who has already been crowned in heaven (τὸν [...] ἡλαττωμένον βλέπομεν [...] ἐστεφανωμένον). Thus Heb interprets the exaltation of Christ which followed his degradation below the angels as the realization of that human greatness and glory which the Psalm asserts. Heb uses the interpretive potential of Ps 8 for his own Adam-Christology: Christ is the true ἄνθρωπος who was exalted even above the angels, and in whose fate the fate of all humankind has been transformed. This interpretation of Ps 8 is reminiscent of the interpretations of Ps 8:5 in Judaism.³⁰

3.3 The son, the angels, and the glory of Adam

Within the framework of his Adam-Christology, Heb argues that Christ has already received that royal power and glory which God has promised humans. The world to come is not subjected to angels (2:5), but to Christ, the Son of God (1:4f), who, as ἄνθρωπος and υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου (2:6c), is the representative of humankind.

While LXX Ps 8:6 describes humans as a little lower than angels, Heb argues that they shall be led to a position even above that of the

29 Cf. Schröger, *Verfasser* 80, 82; Karrer, *Brief* 168; Leschert, *Foundations* 88-90.

30 Cf. Riggensbach, *Brief* 37-38 n. 1; Karrer, *Brief* 168, and particularly Kinzer, *Things* 40-208, whose interpretation of Heb 2:6-8 is in many ways similar to my own. – For a detailed exegesis of Heb 2:5-9, see Gäbel, *Kulttheologie* 144-151.

angels. Heb stresses the difference in quality between Christ and the angels and his exalted position above them in 1:4-14 to prepare for what he has to say in 2:5-10 about the exaltation of humans through Christ's suffering and exaltation. They shall share his power and glory – above the angels.

4. Satan as Jealous Angel and Lord of Death – Heb 2:14-15

4.1 The Problem

Heb 2:16 takes up the rivalry motif once more, thus closing the inclusion with V.5. Immediately before V.16, in 2:14f, Heb mentions Satan as the one who holds the power of death, but who was overcome by the death of Christ.

The close connection with V.16 and the wider context of Heb 1-2 suggest that V.14-15, too, has to be understood within the framework of the argument concerning angels. Loader concludes that Heb interprets the atoning death of Jesus on the cross as the victory over death, as the defeat of demonic / angelic powers opposed to God.³¹ However, Loader himself immediately raises the objection that angels do not appear as powers opposed to God in Heb 1-2.³² Nor, we need to add, does Heb 2:14-15 interpret the death of Jesus as effecting atonement. Thus, this interpretation is not very convincing. Yet Loader is surely right in searching for the connection between V.14-15 and the argument concerning angels, who are explicitly mentioned again in the immediately following verse.

Here, too, the epistle's argument is still related to Adam-Christology and to the motif of rivalry between humans and angels. Again, we need to look at the religio-historical background. Heb takes up a tradition concerning Satan, who is here regarded as an angel and who tempts humans to commit sin and to renounce God. With this in mind, the argument of V.14-15 fits into the context of Heb 1-2 as well as into the wider context.

31 Loader, Sohn 112-113.

32 Op. cit. 114.

4.2 The religio-historical background

In 2Enoch, Adam is described as a “second angel”, who ruled the earth and God’s other creatures in royal splendour (2Enoch 30:11-12). Out of envy, the angel Satanail seduced Eve and, through her, Adam to commit sin, whereupon Adam lost his angelic status. Of particular interest is the reason for Satanail’s envy: “And the devil understood how I [God] wished to create another world, so that everything could be subjected to Adam on earth, to rule and reign over it” (2Enoch 31:3, cf. V.1-6).³³ This is reminiscent of Heb 2:5: οὐ γὰρ ἀγγέλοις ὑπέταξεν τὴν οἰκουμένην τὴν μέλλουσαν.³⁴

In the *Life of Adam and Eve*, the angel Satan describes the creation of Adam, which caused him to lose his own close relationship with God (VitAd 10-16, 47). God preferred man to the angel. On God’s command, Michael worshipped Adam, the image of God; on Michael’s command, all other angels did the same. Satan alone refused to worship Adam. He wanted to become equal to God. When Satan refused to worship Adam, he fell down to earth and lost his glory. As in 2Enoch, he envied humans their glory and seduced Eve, and Adam through her, to commit sin, so that humans, too, might lose their glory.³⁵

To sum up: Satan, regarded as an angel, envied humans their glory and closeness to God and therefore seduced them to commit sin, which leads to death. Adam gave in to temptation and therefore lost his status above the angels, which had caused Satan’s envy. These traditional motives are presupposed in Heb 2:14-15.

4.3 The argument in Heb 2:14-15

Heb takes up the juxtaposition of the “Son” and the angels from 1:4-5, from which unfolds the description of Christ’s relationship with the “sons”, “brothers” and “children” whom God gave him (2:10-13). Christ’s degradation below the angels is an act of solidarity with his “children”, whose life – in contrast to that of heavenly beings – is determined by their existence in blood and flesh (2:14). Thus, the argu-

33 Translation by Anderson, 2 (Slavonic Apocalypse of) Enoch 154.

34 While there is an ongoing debate about the date of composition of 2Enoch, following Bötttrich, *Weltweisheit* 118-125, I consider it likely that 2Enoch dates from the 1st cent. A.D., and indeed from before 70 A.D.

35 These motives appear frequently in early Jewish (and Christian) literature. Cf., e.g., ApkMos 17-19, 39; III (Greek) Bar 4:8; SapSal 2:23-24. Further see Gäbel, *Kulttheologie* 137-142. For Rabbinic parallels, see Schäfer, *Rivalität* 93-94.

ment in 2:14-15 is still part of the exploration of the positions of Christ, humans, and angels relative to each other, and consequently, the rivalry motif is explicitly taken up again in V.16.

Naming σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα, θάνατος and φόβος, Heb 2:14 gives a threefold description of the human condition. The end of life in the σὰρξ is death, which causes fear. Human life, overshadowed by this fear, becomes slavery (V.15). The wider context shows that Heb is interested in temptation and in overcoming temptation. Mortality and fear, part of the human condition, are the causes of the πειρασμός, which becomes the entrance for sin when humans give in to temptation (4:15). Thus, summing up Christ's life under the human condition, Heb 2:18 says about him: ἐν ᾧ γὰρ πέποιθεν αὐτὸς πειρασθεῖς. Similarly, in 4:15 Heb calls Christ the πεπειρασμένον δὲ κατὰ πάντα καθ' ὁμοιότητα. The one who has power over death (2:14) enslaves humans (V.15), tempting them to sin through fear of death. Christ took upon himself this human condition.

Suffering death, yet remaining faithful to God, Christ withstood the temptation to be disobedient to which Adam had yielded. His death has broken the power of the διάβολος and set humans free from slavery.

4.4 Christ, the angels, and temptation

In 2:14-15, Heb makes use of the traditional motif of the envy of the angels and of the temptation of Adam. Christ, the "Son", in contrast to the angels, has taken flesh and blood to become like one of the "sons/children".³⁶ In contrast to the first Adam, he has withstood Satan in the situation of πειρασμός, maintaining obedience to God until death. Satan, traditionally seen as an angel, had subjected humans through his power over death. Now, he was himself overcome through that death by which "man" once again gained his position superior to the angels, which they had envied him. Through his obedience, the "Son" has proved to be the new Adam and the true man whose glory is greater than that of the angels.³⁷

36 Thus, among others, Hofius, Vorhang 78; Laub, Bekenntnis 86.

37 For a detailed exegesis of Heb 2:14-16, see Gäbel, Kulttheologie 158-161.

5. Christ, the angels, and Israel – Heb 2:16; 3:1-6; 2:1-4

5.1 Israel, not the angels

In 2:16, Heb takes up the rivalry motif one last time, giving it a decisive new turn. Whereas the argument so far has juxtaposed angels and humans, emphasising God's preference for the latter, now it is the descendants of Abraham – Israel – whom Christ takes into his care, so that it is Israel rather than the angels who receive God's favour. This statement is rooted in the rivalry motif, which, as we have already seen, shows how God prefers (among others) Moses / Israel to the angels (cf. 3:1). It is with this aspect of the rivalry motif that we are now concerned.

Heb 2:1-4 mentions angels in their function as mediators of revelation. According to Gal 3:19, the Torah was given "through angels by a mediator", Moses. Heb 2:1-4 and 3:1-6 compare Christ to these mediators, to the angels and Moses, respectively. Both passages are connected to the overall argument concerning Christ and the angels in various ways, which we shall explore. However, in 2:1-4; 3:1-6, these connections remain in the background, whereas the main aim here is to highlight God's favour for Israel – which, of course, is precisely what the rivalry motif as stated in 2:16 is about.

5.2 Moses and angels at Sinai according to Jewish tradition

To explore the connections between Heb 2:1-4, 3:1-6, and the argument of Heb concerning Christ and the angels, we will first look at Rabbinic traditions in which the rivalry motif and the quotation of Ps 8 are bound up with Moses' ascent to mount Sinai and the revelation of the Torah.³⁸

bShab 88b: When Moses ascended mount Sinai, the angels asked God why Moses, born of a woman, should come into their midst. When they learned that he was coming to receive the Torah, they said: "What is man...?!" (Ps 8:5). They demanded that the Torah be kept in heaven. Moses convinced them that the Torah was not for them, but for Israel. Now they quoted Ps 8:2: "O Lord, how majestic is thy name!"³⁹

38 Cf. Schultz, *Opposition*; Najman, *Angels*; Schäfer, *Rivalität* 121-131.

39 Cf. Strack / Billerbeck, *Kommentar I* 597-598; Schäfer, *Rivalität* 127, 395. The same tradition may be found in ARN 2 (Abot de Rabbi Nathan, ed. Goldin, 20-21).

PesR 96b: Moses ascended mount Sinai and went further up into heaven. The angels tried to stop him, but God intervened, saying: "When I created man, you said 'What is man...' etc. (Ps 8:5); and now you do not want me to give Israel the Torah..."⁴⁰

MidrTeh 8: When Moses ascended mount Sinai, his face became radiant. This radiance was the "glory and honour" to which Ps 8:6 ("you ... crowned him [man] ...") refers.

According to these traditions, the angels envy Israel the revelation and wish to withhold the Torah from them. Moses, the representative of Israel, overcomes their resistance. Some traditions combine ascent on Sinai and heavenly ascent, and the radiance of Moses' face on Sinai can be interpreted as the glory given to man by God.

As mentioned above, the combination of the rivalry motif with Ps 8 is not found prior to Rabbinic texts, but the motif itself is older. This is true also for the motif of angelic opposition to Moses' ascent on Sinai and further into heaven.⁴¹ As we shall see, there are remarkable similarities between the Rabbinic texts cited above, early Christian texts such as Heb and 2Cor, and the Samaritan book *Memar Marqah* concerning Moses' ascent and the radiance on his face as the glory of Adam / primeval man renewed (cf. 5.3). We can be certain, therefore, that we are dealing with a motif which has been received into early Christian, Rabbinic, and Samaritan tradition, but which goes back to early Jewish times.

5.3 Moses, Christ, and the glory of Adam – Heb 3:1-6

We now turn to Heb 3:1-6. Heb does not explicitly take up the motif of angelic opposition here which, in Jewish tradition, is connected with Moses' ascent to Sinai and his glorification. In fact, he does not even mention angels here. Yet, the following exegesis will show how this passage serves to incorporate the motif of God's favour for Israel, stated in 2:16, into the Adam-Christology of Heb 1-2.

As we have seen, Heb 2:5-9 interprets Christ's exaltation and glorification as the fulfillment of man's destiny according to Ps 8:5-6. In some Rabbinic traditions, however, it is the radiance on the face of Moses which fulfils this announcement of the Psalm (cf. 5.2). Heb ascribes to Christ what is elsewhere ascribed to Moses. In fact, Heb proceeds to insist that Christ's glory surpasses that of Moses (3:3). As we

⁴⁰ Cf. Schäfer, *Rivalität* 129-131, 131-133.

⁴¹ For early Jewish (and other) material, see Najman, *Angels*; Schultz, *Opposition*.

shall now see, the comparison of Christ and Moses in Heb 3:1-6 presupposes a traditional, early Jewish and Samaritan Adam-Moses-typology, which is found, e.g., in *Memar Marqah* and which was transformed into a Moses-Christ-typology. The latter, however, still presupposes the comparison with Adam.

*Memar Marqah*⁴² describes Moses as new Adam.⁴³ When Moses ascended mount Sinai to receive the Torah, he was given the "form" (צלמה) which Adam had lost. In other words, he was given the glory of Adam which was identified with his quality of being created in the image of God (cf. צלם Gen 1:26). The radiance which Moses received remained with him until his death, whereas Adam lost his glory after the fall. Moses, then, has brought back the glory of Adam. Thus, *Memar Marqah* calls Moses the one who opened the garden Eden of the Torah (אשר פתח לנו גן עדן התורה).⁴⁴ In other words, he has reversed the expulsion from paradise after the fall.⁴⁵

In early Christianity, this Adam-Moses-typology was transformed into a Moses-Christ-typology. Paul already must have known a similar comparison between Moses and Adam. He writes in 2Cor 3:7, 12-13 that the radiance on the face of Christ surpasses the radiance on the face of Moses, which was gradually lost.⁴⁶ In 2Cor 4:4, taking up Adam-typology, he calls Christ the εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ: Not Moses, the recipient of revelation on Sinai, brings back the glory of Adam, but Christ, the image of God and archetype of man.⁴⁷ Moses is given the inferior position which was Adam's in tradition, whereas Christ assumes what used to be the traditional position of Moses, who was regarded as a new Adam and mediator of revelation.

Similarly to Paul in 2Cor, Heb 3:1-6 juxtaposes Christ and Moses, and in Heb 3:3, as in 2Cor 3:6-9, Christ's greater δόξα is the evidence for his superiority.⁴⁸ As mentioned above, the reference of δόξα to the glory of Adam in Heb 3:3 presupposes Heb 1:3, where, in an allusion to

42 A Samaritan writing which originated between the 2nd and 4th centuries A.D.; cf. Macdonald, *Memar Marqah*, I, V-VI, XX.

43 Book 5, § 4. Macdonald, *Memar Marqah* I, 128; II, 208f; cf. Kinzer, *Things* 184-185.

44 *Memar Marqah*, §2, op. cit. I, 32; II, 47.

45 Kahle (in Macdonald [ed.], op. cit. I, Vf) regards the statements about Moses in *Memar Marqah* as adaptations of christological motives; cf. Macdonald, op. cit. I, XVII; XVIII; XIX. On the Samaritan view of Moses cf. Macdonald, *Doctrine*.

46 Cf. Kinzer, *Things* 240-244.

47 Cf. Berger, *Theologiegeschichte* 302 (§ 166).

48 As the glorification of Moses during his ascent to Sinai / heaven may imply an angelomorphic aspect, the comparison of Moses' and Christ's δόξα could be, in a limited sense, an angelomorphic element in the christology of Heb, though one that has been filtered through the Adam-Moses-typology and is certainly not used polemically.

Adam's creation in the image of God, Christ is called the ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης κτλ., characterising him as the image of God and archetypal man.

There is one more point of contact with the Adam-Moses-typology of Memar Marqah: The unique predication of Christ as ἀπόστολος in Heb 3:1 has an analogy in the predication of Moses as "apostle / envoy of God", שליחה דאליה, in Memar Marqah 5, § 3.⁴⁹

Thus, Heb incorporates a Moses-Christ-typology, which is based on an Adam-Moses-typology, into his own Adam-Christology. Christ is faithful over God's house, as Moses was faithful in God's house (Heb 3:2-6). The "we" of 3:6 are called "God's house", Israel. Thus, Heb 3:1-6 illustrates how Christ, a new Moses, takes the descendants of Abraham, but not the angels, into his care (cf. 2:16). This juxtaposition of Israel and the angels evokes the traditional motif of angelic opposition to God's favour for Moses / Israel which Heb 3:1-6 (though it is not explicitly mentioned here) presupposes.

5.4 Christ and the angels as mediators of revelation – Heb 2:1-4

We finally turn to Heb 2:1-4. The rivalry motif is not taken up explicitly here, either, but it is obviously presupposed, since the immediately following V.5 cites it as the reason (γάρ) for what V.1-4 have to say. The reasoning behind this argument is as follows:

Heb 2:1-4 emphasises the superiority of the revelation "spoken through the Lord", i.e., Christ, to that which was mediated by angels, i.e., at mount Sinai. This takes up Christ's superiority over the angels as established in Heb 1:4-14, and it shows how angels are "ministering spirits" for the sake of humans (1:14): They had to serve Israel precisely by mediating the revelation of the Torah, which, according to Jewish tradition (cf. 5.2), they opposed. More importantly, as we found in Heb 3:1-6, the interpretation of Christ as new Adam includes his interpretation as new Moses who, as mediator of a superior revelation, brings back the lost glory of Adam. This is why it is so important to hold fast to and to obey the revelation "spoken through the Lord": It gives humans dominion over the world to come – a position which angels will never attain (V.5).

49 Macdonald, Memar Marqah I, 123; II, 201; cf. Lierman, New Testament 71-72.

5.5 Result

Moses is the representative of Israel and mediator of revelation for God's people. Heb integrates both these functions into his Adam-christology which, from 1:3 on, underlies the argument and which extends, with the transformation of the Adam-Moses-typology into a Moses-Christ-typology, until 3:1-6. Before the background of traditions about angelic opposition against God's favour for Israel, Christ mediates the ultimate revelation, brings back the glory of Adam, and bestows dominion over the world to come: In short, he takes Abraham's descendants, not angels, into his care (2:16).

6. Angels in the Epistle to the Hebrews – the wider context

Finally, what has all this got to do with the rest of the epistle? As mentioned before, Heb presupposes traditional Christology and re-interprets it in order to show its soteriological significance. To do so, he re-interprets the exalted Christ as heavenly high priest. After the rivalry motif has been taken up one last time in 2:16, Heb introduces the ἀρχιερεύς-predicate for the first time in 2:17-18. The argument concerning Christ, humans, and angels has demonstrated the enormous soteriological potential which the traditional ὁμολογία about the exalted Christ holds. Thus the "ministering spirits" have fulfilled their task. The High Priest-Christology of Heb will show how the exalted Christ can bring many "sons" to heavenly glory (2:10).

7. Conclusion

To understand the first two chapters of Heb, we need to understand what they have to say about angels. It is before this backdrop that Heb develops his Christology and anthropology. The motif of rivalry between angels and humans is the connecting thread which runs through all of Heb 1-2. The argument as a whole is deeply embedded in early Jewish and early Christian tradition. Out of his ample knowledge of tradition, the author of Heb has formed a theological statement which is at the same time genuinely new and his own.

Why, then, does Heb talk about angels? The epistle does not engage in polemics against angel-worship. Rather, it determines Christ's relationship with God as well as his relationship with humans in contrast to the angels. Set over against the angels, the lowliness and suffering

which Christ took upon himself – the fate of all humans – are highlighted, and Christ's exaltation and superiority over the angels are stressed to show the greatness of the destiny which awaits humans. Heb talks about angels to make it clear what it means to be fully human.

Bibliography

Primary sources

- 2 (Slavonic Apocalypse of) Enoch, ed. Anderson, F.I., in: Charlesworth, J.H. (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, I. New York 1983, 91-221.
- The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan. Abot de Rabbi Nathan (YJS 10), ed. Goldin, J., New Haven et al. 1955.
- Memar Marqah. The Teaching of Marqah, ed. Macdonald, J., I, II (BZAW 84), Berlin 1963.
- Midrash Rabbah, ed. Freedman, H. / Simon, M., 10 vol.s, London et al. 21951.

Secondary sources

- Attridge, H.W., *The Epistle to the Hebrews. A Commentary to the Epistle to the Hebrews (Hermeneia)*, Philadelphia 1989.
- Bensel, K., *Die Melchisedek-Typologie in Hebräer 7,1-28. Ihre Beziehung zu kontemporären Melchisedek-Traditionen und den Prinzipien jüdischer Schriftexegese*, Ph.D. Diss., Evangelische Theologische Fakultät Leuven 2005.
- Berger, K., *Theologiegeschichte des Urchristentums. Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, Tübingen / Basel 21995.
- Bernstein, M.J., Angels at the Aqedah: A Study in the Development of a Midrashic Motif: DSD 7 (2000) 263-291.
- Betz, O., Adam. I *Altes Testament, Neues Testament und Gnosis: TRE I* (1977) 414-424.
- Böttrich, C., *Weltweisheit – Menschheitsethik – Urkult. Studien zum slavischen Henochbuch (WUNT II/50)*, Tübingen 1992.
- Braun, H., *An die Hebräer (HNT 14)*, Tübingen 1984.
- Bruce, F.F., *The Epistle to the Hebrews (NIC)*, Grand Rapids 1964.
- Carrell, P.C., *Jesus and the Angels. Angelology and the Christology of the Apocalypse of John (MSSNTS 95)*, Cambridge 1997.
- Cullmann, O., *Die Christologie des Neuen Testaments*, Tübingen 1957.
- Davidson, M.J., Angels at Qumran. A Comparative Study of 1 Henoch 1-36, 72-108 and Sectarian Writings from Qumran (JSPE.S 11), Sheffield 1992.
- Dunn, J.D.G., *Christology in the Making. An Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*, reprint of the 2nd ed., Grand Rapids 1996.

- Eltester, F.-W., *Eikon im Neuen Testament* (BZNW 23), Berlin 1958.
- Fletcher-Louis, C.H.T., *Luke-Acts: Angels, Christology and Soteriology* (WUNT II/94), Tübingen 1997.
- Fletcher-Louis, C.H.T., *The Revelation of the Sacral Son of Man. The Genre, History of Religions Context and Meaning of the Transfiguration*, in: Aveline, F. / Lichtenberger, H. (ed.), *Auferstehung – Resurrection. The Fourth Durham-Tübingen Research Symposium. Resurrection, Transfiguration and Exaltation in Old Testament, Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, Tübingen, September, 1999 (WUNT 135), Tübingen 2001, 247-298.
- Fossum, J.E., *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord. Samaritan and Jewish Concepts of Intermediation and the Origin of Gnosticism* (WUNT 36), Tübingen 1985.
- Gäbel, G., *Die Kulttheologie des Hebräerbriefes. Eine religionsgeschichtlich-exegetische Studie* (WUNT II/212), Tübingen 2006.
- Gieschen, C.A., *Angelomorphic Christology. Antecedents and Early Evidence* (AGJU 42), Leiden 1998.
- Gleason, R.C., *Angels and the Eschatology of Heb 1-2: NTS 49* (2003) 90-107.
- Goldberg, A., *Der Heilige und die Heiligen. Vorüberlegungen zur Theologie des heiligen Menschen im rabbinischen Judentum*, in: Goldberg, A., *Mystik und Theologie des rabbinischen Judentums. Gesammelte Studien, I* (TSAJ 61), ed. Schlüter, M., and Schäfer, P., Tübingen 1997, 304-320.
- Goulder, M., *Hebrews and the Ebionites: NTS 49* (2003) 393-406.
- Hannah, D.D., *Michael and Christ. Michael Traditions and Angel Christology in Early Christianity* (WUNT II/109), Tübingen 1999.
- Hegemann, H., *Der Brief an die Hebräer* (ThHK 16), Berlin 1988.
- Hegemann, H., *Christologie im Hebräerbrief*, in: Breytenbach, C. et al. (ed.), *Anfänge der Christologie*, FS F. Hahn, Göttingen 1991, 337-351.
- Hoffmann, M., *The Destroyer and the Lamb. The Relationship between Angelomorphic and Lamb Christology in the Book of Revelation* (WUNT II/203), Tübingen 2005.
- Hofius, O., *Der Vorhang vor dem Thron Gottes. Eine exegetisch-religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu Hebräer 6,19f und 10,19f* (WUNT 14), Tübingen 1972.
- Hooker, M.D., *Philippians 2:6-11*, in: Ellis, E.E. / Grässer, E. (ed.), *Jesus und Paulus*, FS W.G. Kümmel zum 70. Geburtstag, Göttingen 1975, 151-164.
- Horton, F., *The Melchizedek Tradition. A Critical Examination of the Sources to the fifth Century A.D. and in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (MSSNTS 30), Cambridge 1976.
- Käsemann, E., *Kritische Analyse von Phil 1,5-11*, in: Käsemann, E., *Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen, I*, Göttingen 1960, 51-95.

- Käsemann, E., *Das wandernde Gottesvolk. Eine Untersuchung zum Hebräerbrief* (FRLANT 55), Göttingen 1961.
- Karrer, M., *Jesus Christus im Neuen Testament* (GNT 11), Göttingen 1998.
- Karrer, M., *Der Brief an die Hebräer, I. Kapitel 1,1-5,10* (ÖTBK 20,1), Gütersloh / Würzburg 2002.
- Kinzer, M.S., "All things under His Feet". Psalm 8 in the New Testament and in Other Jewish Literature of Late Antiquity, Ph.D. Diss. (Microfilm), University of Michigan 1995.
- Kister, M., *Observations on Aspects of Exegesis, Tradition and Theology in Midrash, Pseudepigrapha and other Jewish Writings*, in: Reeves, J.C. (ed.), *Tracing the Threads. Studies in the Vitality of Jewish Pseudepigrapha* (SBLEJL 6), Atlanta 1994, 1-34.
- Laub, F., *Bekenntnis und Auslegung. Die paränetische Funktion der Christologie im Hebräerbrief* (BU 15), Regensburg 1980.
- Leschert, D.F., *Hermeneutical Foundations of Hebrews. A Study in the Validity of the Epistle's Interpretation of some Core Citations from the Psalms* (NABPR.DS 10), Lewiston et al. 1994.
- Lierman, J., *The New Testament Moses. Christian Perceptions of Moses and Israel in the Setting of Jewish Religion* (WUNT II/173), Tübingen 2004.
- Loader, W.R.G., *Sohn und Hoherpriester. Eine traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zur Christologie des Hebräerbriefes* (WMANT 53), Neukirchen-Vluyn 1981.
- Macdonald, J., *The Samaritan Doctrine of Moses*: SJTh 13 (1960) 149-162.
- Mach, M., *Entwicklungsstadien des jüdischen Engelglaubens in vorrabbinischer Zeit* (TSAJ 34), Tübingen 1992.
- Najman, H., *Angels at Sinai. Exegesis, Theology and Interpretive Authority*: DSD 7 (2000) 313-333.
- Peterson, E., *Die Befreiung Adams aus der 'Ανάγκη. Zum Gedächtnis von F. Cumont*, in: Peterson, E., *Frühkirche, Judentum und Gnosis. Studien und Untersuchungen*, Rom et al. 1959, 107-128.
- Riggenbach, E., *Der Brief an die Hebräer. 2. und 3.[.] vielfach ergänzte und berichtigte Auflage* (KNT 14), Leipzig / Erlangen 1922.
- Rottzoll, D.U. (ed.), *Rabbinischer Kommentar zur Genesis. Darstellung der Rezeption des Buches Genesis in Mischna und Talmud unter Angabe targumischer und midraschischer Paralleltex-te* (SJ 14), Berlin / New York 1994.
- Schäfer, P., *Rivalität zwischen Menschen und Engeln. Studien zur rabbinischen Engelvorstellung*, Berlin / New York 1975.
- Schäfer, P., *Engel und Menschen in der Hekhalot-Literatur*, in: Schäfer, P., *Hekhalot-Studien* (TSAJ 19), Tübingen 1988, 250-276.
- Schröger, F., *Der Verfasser des Hebräerbriefes als Schriftausleger* (BU 4), Regensburg 1968.

- Schultz, J.P., Angelic Opposition to the Ascension of Moses and the Revelation of the Law: JQR 61 (1970/71) 282-307.
- Speyer, H., Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran, Hildesheim et al. ³1971.
- Spicq, C., *L'Épître aux Hébreux*, I-II, Paris ²1952-1953.
- Spicq, C., λειτουργία, λειτουργία, λειτουργικός, λειτουργός, in: Spicq, C., *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, II. ἐμπόψω, transl. and ed. Ernest, J.D., Peabody 1994, 378-384.
- Stemberger, G., *Einleitung in Talmud und Midrasch*, München ⁸1992.
- Steyn, G., Addressing an Angelomorphic Christological Myth in Hebrews? HTS 59 (2003) 1107-1128.
- Strack, H.L. / Billerbeck, P., *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, I. Das Evangelium nach Matthäus, München 1926; III. Die Briefe des Neuen Testaments und die Offenbarung Johannis, München 1926.
- Stuckenbruck, L.T., Angel Veneration and Christology. A Study in Early Judaism and in the Christology of the Apocalypse of John (WUNT II/70), Tübingen 1995.
- Vollenweider, S., Zwischen Monotheismus und Engelchristologie. Überlegungen zur Frühgeschichte des Christusglaubens, in: Vollenweider, S., *Horizonte neutestamentlicher Christologie. Studien zu Paulus und zur frühchristlichen Theologie* (WUNT 144), Tübingen 2002, 3-27.
- Walter, N., Christologie und irdischer Jesus im Hebräerbrief, in: Walter, N., *Praeparatio Evangelica. Studien zur Umwelt, Exegese und Hermeneutik des Neuen Testaments*, ed. Kraus, W., and Wilk, F. (WUNT 98), Tübingen 1997, 151-168.
- Weiss, H.-F., *Der Brief an die Hebräer* (KEK 13), Göttingen 1991.